

## The Cross of Christ – Part 7

Susan is going to start by reading the Scripture just to recapture our attention to the subject matter for today. Luke 23: 39-42 “Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him saying, ‘if You are the Christ, save Yourself and us.’ But the other answering, rebuked him saying, ‘do you not even fear God seeing you are under the same condemnation, and we indeed justly; for we received the due reward for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.’ And then he said to Jesus, ‘Lord, remember me when You come into Your Kingdom.’ ”

Remember, at the cross, we prepared to land; “this is holy ground.” We looked at the God-man in the Garden of Gethsemane to receive the revelation that we also are God-men. “Do you not know that the Spirit of Christ dwells within you?” Then we looked at the “sweet suffering”—“sweet suffering” being that suffering which is accepted for the greater pleasure of glorifying God. Targeted tears—“Don’t weep for Me; weep for yourselves and your children.” The forgiving of ignorance—“Forgive them for they know not what they do.” To see that not just as a demonstration of a godly attitude, but our calling to “forgive them for they know not what they do”; because remember, the veiled are simply who *we* were and thus, our present reminder of the grace of God for us. And then we began last week to look at paradise promised—to the thief on the cross, “Today you will be with Me in paradise.” But where we left it off last time, remember, we looked at the model of the repentant thief and the unrepentant thief as the model of all of humanity. Because “I am the way” and Jesus stands at that “Y” in the road, saying, “I am the way; which way will you go?” And we go either through Jesus as the way, or we go some other way which is a way of our own reckoning, where we declare truth to be what we say rather than truth being Jesus, Who He is and what He says. Remember, this thief started off speaking to Jesus, saying, “Jesus (this is personal), remember me.” And we left it at that point.

The faith of this thief, the repentant thief, is intrinsic in the statement where he acknowledges not just Jesus, “when you come”, but the absolute Lordship of Jesus in one simple sentence. Well, how do we know that? Because of his acknowledgement of the Lordship of Jesus over death itself. View the circumstances - Jesus is being mocked and cursed; Jesus is bleeding from the whips, the thorns, the nails; He is on a cross being crucified with criminals as a criminal; the life vitality is ebbing out of Him; He’s being progressively weakened; He’s coming nearer death and all the civil authority of Rome is there to see that death occurs. All the religious authority of the Jews is there to see that death occurs. The mob is there and will be satisfied with nothing less than seeing death occur; because they’re the ones who said, “away with Him, crucify Him.” Yet this thief, in spite of all the testimony of the circumstances, says, “*When* you come”—not *if*. This thief says ‘I believe in You, Jesus, more than I believe in these circumstances. *You* have the final say, not these circumstances. The point is not whether You, Jesus, live or die; the point is You have power over death.’ He was functioning in the reality of what Jesus spoke to Mary and Martha when He says, “I am the resurrection.” The thief is now regarding Him as the resurrection. Revelation 19:10 – “The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.” The thief is functioning in the testimony of Jesus; and thus, in the

spirit of prophecy. Recall the book of Acts has not been written yet. But here this thief prophetically gives testimony of Jesus when he says, “It will be impossible for the grave to hold You. Remember me when You come.”

Acts 2:24 (written later) says – “And God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death since it was impossible for death to hold Him in its power.” But the thief is speaking that before that death has ever occurred. The thief is also walking in his freedom in Christ. Well how is he doing that? Hebrews 2:14-15 – “Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He, Jesus Himself, likewise also partook of the same flesh and blood that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death (that is the devil); and might deliver those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.” Notice this thief doesn’t cry out to be saved from his cross. He doesn’t cry out to be relieved of his pain. He doesn’t cry out to be removed from the circumstances. He does not cry out to be spared death; yet he says, “Remember me when You come.” He does cry out to the One Who has the power of life over death. He knows that if that One simply remembers him, then he has no need to fear his own impending death. This thief is walking free now of the captivity of the fear of death. Thus, he’s outside the power of the one who has the power of keeping you in the fear of death—namely Satan. This thief is on a cross in the flesh, but walking free in Christ with no fear of death in the spirit. This thief is free indeed. Geographically, he’s on a cross just outside the walls of Jerusalem. In the flesh, he’s a crucified criminal according to the system and decisions of men. But in the spirit, he’s free in Christ, soaring above the limitations of geography, soaring above the limitations of his own cross, soaring above the limitations of the systems of man, soaring above all limitations in this physical realm. That is free indeed.

Hear the faith of this thief because he goes on in this simple sentence, “Jesus, remember me when You come in Your Kingdom.” Notice that—“in Your Kingdom.” Did this thief say “*in Your Kingdom*”? Did he say that to this despicable, abominational mass of protoplasm that’s near death hanging on a cross as a criminal? Did he indirectly call Him King, by saying in Your Kingdom? That implies there will be a kingdom, and every kingdom is only a kingdom because it has a king. And that kingdom must belong to someone, so who does it belong to? He says “Your Kingdom.” So this thief is using “Your”, implying the One to Whom he is speaking. Well, to whom is that one? Recall how he started the sentence - “Jesus”. Thus this kingdom that this thief is referring to has a king and this thief is calling Jesus this King. But king...which king? He doesn’t stop there. Hear the faith of this thief, as he once again, gives testimony of Jesus in the spirit of prophecy.

Revelation 19:16 – “And on His robe and on His thigh, He has a name written—King of kings and Lord of lords.” See this Earth has had many kings, has kings even now; but this thief didn’t stop with just saying “king”; he said “king” indirectly by saying “Your Kingdom”, but how do you say King of kings? Because this One that he’s now speaking of as “Your Kingdom”, is the same One that he acknowledged just before as having power over death, when this thief said, “When You come”, as Jesus is melting away in the flesh to death. That can refer to only one king; because only one king has the power

of life over death. So this King is the King of kings, God incarnate. This thief is not just honoring Him as a king, this thief is honoring Him as the King of kings, the one King Who has the power of life over death. He is honoring Him as God Himself. So this thief in a couple of simple sentences has a lot to teach us and he's not through yet.

Look at the circumstances and see his faith. This thief, while hanging on a cross himself, is defending Jesus, the One Who has not delivered him from his cross, to everyone within earshot. And you say, 'surely, the thief's voice will be lost in the chorus of voices defending Jesus. He spent three years of testimony on Earth. He had intimate associates, intimate disciples, spoke to many. Surely the voice of this thief, defending Jesus, will be lost in the chorus of defenders.' Sadly, not so. In the very previous chapter, Luke 22:55-61 – Peter denied Him three times. Likewise the disciples – Matthew 26:56 – “Then all the disciples left Him and fled.” Apparently, John returned after fleeing. For as we'll see later, Jesus spoke to John and spoke to Jesus' own mother. But there is nothing in Scripture that any of these defended Him. Now that doesn't prove that they did not; because we all know the absence of proof is not proof of absence. But the fact remains that the only Scriptural evidence that we have of anyone defending Jesus on the cross is of this thief. Now how could that be? Because this thief is the only one now who has broken free of his cocoon of carnality, where we assess everything in terms of cost, comfort, convenience, and control. This thief has been broken of all that; this thief is functioning outside all that; this thief has nothing to lose and all others in witness have something to lose. They could lose their comfort; they could lose their position; they could lose their health; they could lose their lives; but this thief was past all that. This thief is no longer seeing through the glass dimly of what he could lose. Thus, he was the only one who could see clearly. Because so long as we're looking at life based on what we can lose, we are seeing and adding dimness to our sight. But as Paul wrote in Philippians 3:8 – “More than that I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord, for Whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ.” You see, this thief had gained Christ. He had lost everything else, but that meant he had nothing else to hold onto and nothing else to place his faith in. Now he saw the truth in unvarnished fashion. He saw that he had been liberated by losing all else. He now saw that everything that he would have held dear in his prior life as a thief had kept him from giving it up in order to gain the one thing of value—Jesus Christ Himself. But he correctly saw now that all that he had held onto and all that he had held dear was rubbish and gave him nothing with which to face eternity. Because nothing that he had held onto in his fleshly existence had the promise of any eternal value. Because our relationship with Jesus Christ is the one and only thing that we take into eternity. This thief had the pearl of great value; this thief had the treasure in the field for which he sold everything that he might have this one treasure.

This thief had done what Paul had done...but what took Paul years to do, had taken this thief (at most) a few hours to do. Philippians 1:21 – “For me to live is Christ and to die is gain.” The only words of this thief recorded in Scripture after his conversion, all relate to these fundamental things: to the fear of the Lord (“do you not even fear God?”), to his own unrighteousness, to his deserved penalty (“we're getting what we deserve on this

cross”), to the purity of Christ (“this man is innocent”), and to Christ as his salvation, as the King of kings (where he says “remember me when You come in Your Kingdom”), as the King of kings (“with the power of life over death”), the King Who will come again in His Kingdom. For this thief, he now had the heart position of: “to live is Jesus. All else is rubbish and to die is gain. Why should I call and pray out to Jesus to relieve me from the suffering when to die is gain?”

Well, how did this happen? Well, we have to draw from the sum of the Word of God. John 6:44 – “No one can come to me, Jesus, except the Father draw him.” Matthew 16:16-17 – “And Simon Peter answered and said, ‘Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God’ and Jesus answered and said to him, ‘blessed are you Simon Bar Jonah; because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you; but My Father Who is in Heaven revealed it to you.’ ” John 3:3 – “One must be born again to even see the Kingdom of God.” I Corinthians 12:3 – “No one can speak His name as Lord except by the Holy Spirit.” And John 6:37 – “He who is sent to Me, I will in wise cast out.” We know from the sum of the Word of God that our God exists in three persons. It’s part of the mystery of God, part of the Holiness of God. The Father wills and decrees. The Son creates and achieves; and the Spirit reveals and empowers. So our one God, in three persons, performing six functions to fulfill the purposes of God, according to the plan of God, while displaying the character of God, while in perfect unity and harmony in the Trinity. So, although the Holy Spirit was not yet given to indwell and not yet released in fullness of power, I believe (though of course, don’t insist that it be doctrinal for you) that the Trinity was at work here. That the Father drew, that the Holy Spirit revealed, that the name of Jesus was spoken as Lord, “remember me when You come after death in Your Kingdom.” And when Jesus heard His name called with that kind of testimony, “He in no wise cast him out.” He knew that this thief had been drawn by the Father, revealed to by the Spirit, and Jesus was not about to cast this one, who had been given to him, out. Jesus had just received a hug from the Father, and a hug from the Spirit before entering the darkness that He was about to enter; as if to simply remind Him what this darkness will be all about—the redemption of mankind. And that’s the joy before Jesus, and that’s the model demonstrated for us when this thief simply turns and says, “Jesus, remember me when you come in Your Kingdom.”

Well, now let’s look, lastly, at what is usually discussed firstly about this thief—namely the hour of his conversion. That’s a legitimate subject because it is true. But obviously from what has gone before in this discussion, that’s not the whole truth. That’s not even the major truth. This thief does demonstrate that we are never to presume that it is too late for someone’s salvation. Because remember, a few hours before, this thief had been joining in the cursing of Jesus at his side. And this thief after conversion had only a short time to live, measured in hours. So we should never presume that’s not enough time for salvation and not enough time for testimony. Because the time between salvation and death may be very short as it was with this thief; but there is still plenty of time for testimony. We sometimes tend to think that the more loquacious we are with our testimony, the more can be accomplished. The greater the volume of writings, the more can be accomplished; and I don’t speak against those things, but we also need to be reminded of the other side of this that your testimony may be only a few sentences like

this thief, but that testimony may well reverberate through the ages, just as we still stand here and share and break the bread from the Word of God about this thief 2,000 years later as the model of what happens when a man is transformed; as a model of what happens when he regards Jesus as Lord; as a model of what happens when he regards Jesus as the way; as a model of what happens when we regard Jesus as the resurrection; as a model of what happens when we regard Jesus as the light; when we regard Jesus as the truth; when we're walking free of the bondage of this world; the lies of this world, the unbelief of this world, you see. This thief in a few sentences as he spoke of the fear of the Lord, his own guilt, getting what he deserved, the innocence of Jesus; but this thief had listened to Jesus when He said, "Forgive them for they know not what they do." And this thief knew that was not a humanly behavior. That was a *holy* behavior that no human could do. So this thief, with his deathbed conversion (if you want to call it that), spoke a few sentences and *still* is that kind of outrageous testimony for all of the human race for 2,000 years thereafter. It's said that deathbed conversions that are true are rare. Perhaps, but we're never to presume there won't be one and we're never to presume that the one which occurs is illegitimate. We're to remain earthen vessels, living epistles, ambassadors for Christ right up to the time that death occurs because that spirit has now departed that body. So if the spirit is gone, there is no point testifying to the one who is lying on his deathbed. How can we do anything less than do those things, given the witness of this thief?

Rahab, the harlot is still called 'Rahab the harlot' in the chapter of the role call of faith, namely Hebrews 11:31. She is called 'the harlot' because that's what she *was*; it's part of her testimony. As she later could well be called 'Rahab the faithful', as she was placed in the lineage ultimately producing our Savior. Likewise this thief is still called 'the thief' on the cross. Although he might well be called, 'the last and best witness of Jesus Christ before Christ's death on the cross.' Now Jesus gave many affirming words to people throughout Scripture. Matthew 9:22 – "Your faith has made you whole", *that* He spoke to the woman who had the issue from the womb. Or Luke 7:9 – "I have not found such faith in all of Israel", He spoke to the centurion who understood Jesus' sovereign control over sickness, even from a distance. But no words are as pregnant with meaning and pregnant with power as the words that Jesus turned and spoke to this thief who had just given that testimony. Luke 23:43 – "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in paradise." See, this thief had faith, and it is true "without faith, it is impossible to please God"; but turning and complimenting the faith of this thief was not sufficient for Jesus. Jesus could have called upon His Father to miraculously save this thief from death; and thus, allow this thief more time to give testimony on Earth. But that was not sufficient for Jesus. No, Jesus had to have this one and He had to have him not later, but now. "Today, you shall be with Me in paradise." Remember, it said that "Jesus goes and prepares a place for us, that He'll welcome us where He is for all of eternity." And this thief is hearing the words of Jesus right now saying, 'today, I want you with Me right where I am. And I'm going to paradise, so I want you in paradise, not because of paradise, but because that's where I'm going to be and I want you with Me.' Jesus had found someone, however late his conversion and however brief his testimony, whose heart was completely His. Where to die has become gain and his life, whatever few seconds, minutes, or hours may remain, is Christ. And He simply had to be with one like

that today and forever more. That's when to die is gain. Jesus could see all of Heaven rejoicing as one more lost sheep was found. See, that thief can become our model of regeneration, our model of being born again, our model of renewal, our model of being transformed by the renewing of the mind. He's come not only to the One who is life, but he has received life and embraced that life and dismissed everything other than that life.

And when that occurs, the past becomes irrelevant. The present circumstances become irrelevant. The systems of men become irrelevant. And the future becomes assured. Isaiah 43:18-19 – “Do not call to mind the former things or ponder things of the past. Behold I will do something new. Now it will spring forth. Will you not be aware of it?” And sometimes I think we spend so much time pondering the past, living in self-condemnation of things that we've done. But this thief, although acknowledging what he had done and saying 'I'm receiving what I deserve', simply turned and said, “Jesus, remember me when You come in Your Kingdom.” See this does connect as we look at these different components of the cross that we've talked about with forgiveness. Because remember the one who is clinging to unforgiveness is still pondering things of the past. The one who is living in self-condemnation is still pondering things of the past. *A new thing* has begun; but unforgiveness means that you function as if you don't even know it. Self-condemnation means you're living as if you don't even know it as you insist on living in the past rather than worshipping in the precious present, saying, 'Jesus, remember me when you come.'

This thief has a lot to teach us in a few short sentences that has taken two sessions to cover it. The lateness of his conversion is only one little part of that. Now let us receive these revelations and walk out today with a dedication to living our lives from this point on as this thief was living his in his last few breaths on planet Earth. Where to live is Christ and to die is gain. Free in Christ, living above the circumstances. Free in Christ, having no fear of death. Free in Christ, having walked outside of the cocoon of carnality that previously had kept us in bondage. This is a new thing and this is what Christianity is. That's called “the abundant life.” *Do we not even know it?* See, this thief did. So may we begin today to walk out of here with a new commitment to live in the precious present, in the light of paradise promised, in the light of our vision, which is our sustaining view of all eternity, which is the accumulated promises of our sovereign God. See, for we are all thieves who have stolen the glory of God. But now as we receive that revelation in an even greater fashion of how, as thieves, we have stolen the glory of God, we turn and *bring* Him glory by swimming in the ocean of the sea of grace in which we found ourselves. For we were children of wrath, we were worshippers of Satan, formally or informally; “but God”. Just as God reached down and touched this thief, God has reached down and touched us, given us spirit life, given us the promise of all eternity, and given us the abundant life, and given us the freedom in Christ, however little we have walked in it.

So let us ponder not the past, for Jesus has it covered. Let us fear not the future for Jesus has it covered. Let us live in the precious present as the only moment that we can worship God, remind ourselves that we cannot worship God in the past (it's past), we can't worship God in the future (it's yet to come), but right this very moment even as we

walk out of here today in this precious present, the only moment that we can worship God. And how do we do so? As God-men. “Do you not know that you’re the temple of the Holy Spirit?” Do you not know that the Spirit of Christ dwells within you? Do you not know that you’re not alone? Do you not know that you’re not dependent on your own power and your own strength? Do you not know that your adequacy is of God. Do you not know these things? When you know them and walk in the light of them, is when you’re walking in your freedom in Christ, living the abundant life, displaying the true and accurate testimony of Jesus because this is what He did as the God-man and we learned that in the Garden of Gethsemane. How will we know? One way that we’ll know is when we too can say, “Father forgive them for they know not what they do.” That’s when to live is Christ and to die is gain and we’re functioning as God-men in the light of paradise promised. And all of that is taught to us by this thief, on the cross, in a few sentences. So may we never again think that the power of our testimony is dependent on how eloquent we are, dependent on our personality, dependent on our adequacy, dependent on the volume of verbal expression, dependent on the volume of written expression, or dependent on anything other than the power of God, the power of the Word of God, that can divide soul from spirit and bring about what happened in this thief within a few moments on the cross to take him from cursing Jesus to embracing Jesus, as the King of kings and Lord of lords. That’s how long it takes for the grace of God to work in the life of a man. So thank you for listening.